

A FEW REMARKS



ON

Bishop Colenso on the Pentateuch.

BY THE

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“WHAT IF SOME DID NOT BELIEVE? SHALL THEIR UNBELIEF MAKE THE FAITH OF GOD OF NONE EFFECT? GOD FORBID: YEA, LET GOD BE TRUE, BUT EVERY MAN A LIAR; THAT THOU MIGHTEST BE JUSTIFIED IN THY SAYINGS, AND MIGHTEST OVERCOME WHEN THOU ART JUDGED.”—ROM. III. 3, 4.

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ON

BISHOP COLENSO ON THE PENTATEUCH.

WE who believe in the Word of God, and look for the fulfilment of its predictions, believe that Antichrist shall come; that is, that before the end, some gigantic form of evil shall arise, which in its development shall more and more assume the form of direct opposition to the kingdom of JESUS CHRIST. We infer also, from Scripture, that this opposition shall not be open but covert; that the instrument whereby Satan shall work his final act of opposition to Him who hath "bruised his head," shall be, not so much by open denial of the truth, as by secretly undermining it—the "deceiver being himself deceived,"—that those who shall fall beneath the power of this great evil, shall not be so much open blasphemers, as "believers in a lie," drawn aside from the truth, by "a strong delusion."

It becomes us not to speak positively as to the particular form which *the* Antichrist shall assume; we may not point the finger at this person or that, this thing or that thing, and say positively, "*there is the Antichrist.*" Yet the Scriptures, predictive of this evil, certainly seem to stamp it with one characteristic mark—*an opposition to the inspired word of God, and the truth as handed down and interpreted by the Church.* Thus the Apostle, in 2 Thess. ii., after speaking of Antichrist, that man of sin, says, "All shall be damned who *believe not the*

truth.” And he then goes on to “give thanks to God in behalf of the Thessalonians, because He had from the beginning chosen them to salvation of the Spirit, and *belief of the truth.*” And he then bids them “hold fast the traditions which they had been taught, whether by word or epistle.”

Without presuming then, to denominate this or that thing *the Antichrist*, we cannot witness the efforts being now made, not by openly professed unbelievers, but by men holy in life, and alleged earnestness for the truth—we cannot, for instance, take up “Colenso on the Pentateuch,” at the same time considering that he is an angel, or Bishop of the Church of CHRIST, without many painful sensations and fearful surmisings, that for our own days has been reserved that revelation of “the mystery of iniquity,” which hath “already worked” in partial denials of the truth, but which now being “no longer let,” shows its bold unblushing form in an open denial of the inspiration of the Word of God. And if what the Bishop says, in the work before us, be indeed true, (p. xxvi.,) that “not a few among the more highly educated classes of society in England, and multitudes among the more intelligent operatives, are in danger of drifting into irreligion and practical atheism, under this dim sense of the unsoundness of the popular view;” (the popular view, thank God! being *the infallibility* of the Bible,) if this be true, as the Bishop states, we can no longer doubt that “the mystery of iniquity doth already work;” and, if it be true, as is also stated, (p. xxiii.,) that “a very wide spread distrust does exist among the intelligent laity in England, as to the soundness of the ordinary view of Scripture inspiration,” then we have no hesitation in saying, that “even now are there many Antichrists.” And if, as the Bishop states further, (pp. xxiii., xxiv.) that “the greater body of the more intelligent students of our universities, no longer come forward to devote themselves to the service of the Church,” because “the condition of a young man’s entering the ministry of the Church of England, is, that he must solemnly bind himself for life to believe unfeignedly in all the canonical Scriptures;” then we confess that the leaven has worked indeed, and is likely to work.

We would, however, in passing, express our thanks to God

that the above statement, if disclosing a lamentable fact as regards the rising generation, bears its testimony to the faithfulness of our branch of the Church of CHRIST, which as yet excludes them from her orders; and we would recommend to the "more intelligent students of our universities," the declaration of the Apostle to the youthful Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" a declaration which certainly referred to the Old Testament, those Scriptures which "Timothy had known from a child." And we would recommend to Bishop Colenso, to consider the command given by S. Paul to Bishop Timothy and Bishop Titus, to "speak the things which become sound doctrine," and instead of pandering to the unsanctified acumen of the young men of our universities, to heed the admonition which the Apostle gave to Timothy and Titus, to exhort "young men to be sober minded," (Titus ii. 6,) and the deacons that "they hold the mystery of the faith," (1 Tim. iii. 9,) with many exhortations to the same effect. However, thank God! we are not compelled to take all Bishop Colenso says for gospel, whether it relates to his expositions of Scripture, or his alleged facts. We are not obliged to believe his *ipse dixit* about "the educated classes," or "the intelligent operatives," being scared at the idea that the Bible is inspired; nor what he says about the students at the universities "shrinking from the ministry." Nor are we obliged to tremble for the Church of England, merely because he says she "must fall through her own internal weakness, by losing her hold upon the growing intelligence of all classes, unless some remedy be soon applied to the present state of things," (p. xxiv).

We can take the Bishop's statement most feelingly in another sense, and we do tremble at the thought that the Church of England must fall by her own internal weakness, by losing her hold upon all that is worthy of being called "the intelligence of all classes," unless some remedy be very soon applied to the present state of things; a state of things, indeed, in which a Bishop of the Church, "sitting in the temple of God," and, we may add, "opposing himself to all that is called God, or that is worshipped," is allowed to hold his post, and disseminate errors contrary to his ordination and consecration vows.

Not all the Bishop's protestations of "sincerity in searching after the Truth," his "sense of obligation to declare the Truth," nor even our respect for his untiring zeal and self-denying labours in the missionary cause, will induce us to forbear denouncing him as a heretic. We wait for no authoritative sentence, though we trust that such will emanate; but we place his book beside the Book of Life, and we pronounce it *a monstrous, unblushing piece of heresy*. We repeat our hope, and trust that, ere long, some judicial condemnation will emanate from those who have authority given them to decide in such cases. We really marvel at the Bishop forcing to his aid the Protestant character of the Church. Hear this, ye ghosts of the Reformers and Martyrs for the sake of the Truth! "I cannot but believe that our Church, representing, as it is supposed to do, the religious feeling of a free, Protestant nation, requires us now, as in the days of the Reformation, to protest against all perversion of the Truth, and all suppression of it, for the sake of peace, or by mere authority." (P. xxxiii.)

If Protestantism can be stretched to this extent, let us by all means give it up in name and in practice. We trust, however, that the Bishop's view of the character of our Protestant nation and our Reformed Church will not screen him from a protestation of the Church against his own errors. Shall it be that, in things pertaining to God's unchanging Truth alone, men can be false to their colours, without being denounced as traitors to Him Whose heralds they are? Shall it be that the promulgation of his own private and unauthorized opinions, on a recent occasion, recalled from his presidency an able and most useful servant of his Sovereign; and shall one whose office it is to promulgate God's Truth and teach His Word, and look to it that others do the same, be permitted, in the garb of the Church, to give the weight and authority of his high office to the dispensation of heresy? For the Truth's sake, for the sake of the Church which is "a witness and keeper of Holy Writ," for the great missionary cause, we hope and trust it will not be so. We who subscribe to the cause of the Church's missions, and cast our money into the treasury of God, with the oft-repeated prayer that He would "take from all Jews, infidels,

and heretics *contempt of His Word*," we do not much approve of a state of things in which we must use the prayer for the *teacher* as well as the taught, the *missionary* as well as the heathen. We have always given our subscriptions in the hope and belief that our missionaries, more especially our Bishops, are men sound in the faith, and that we are aiding to extend, in heathen lands, that "Church in which the pure Word of God is preached." In the present instance, alas! we believe a solitary one, we find ourselves deceived. We find the missionary field has only been a hot-bed for forcing into fruit the seeds of heresy which had been sown before. "It has happened," says the Bishop (p. vi.) "that in translating the Scriptures into the Zulu tongue, I have been brought face to face with questions which caused me some uneasiness in former days." And again (p. vii.) "I have been brought face to face with the very questions which I then put by."

And what shall we say to such a passage as the following? (p. vii.): "Whilst translating the story of the Flood, I have had a simple-minded, but intelligent native,—one with the docility of a child, but the reasoning powers of mature age,—look up and ask, 'Is all this true? Do you really believe that all this happened thus?—that all the beasts, and birds, and creeping things upon the earth, large and small, from hot countries and cold, came thus by pairs, and entered into the ark with Noah?'"

Such was the question—a very natural one—of an unconverted heathen, but one, we should have thought, not very difficult for his spiritual teacher to answer. The Bishop, however, instead of directing his inquiring mind to the truth, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" turns to his geological knowledge and love of figures, and returns an answer to his own mind, which he flatters himself is not "speaking lies in the Name of the LORD."

The above passage from the Prophet Zechariah (xiii.) which the Bishop quotes, seems to us to be somewhat *à propos* of the position which he has chosen for himself in the Church of CHRIST. For, be it observed, the Prophet is speaking of those teachers whose doctrine tended to draw away men from the

Truth of God. And he says (verse 3), "It shall come to pass that, if any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live, for thou speakest lies in the Name of the LORD; and his father and his mother shall thrust him through when he prophesieth." A suggestion this which we trust the Church, the Bishop's spiritual parent, will not be slow to adopt; and we would fain entertain the hope that the penitent state of the false prophet here described may be that of the Bishop, who, beneath the wounds of ecclesiastical censure, will be brought to acknowledge that "the wounds are those which he received in the house of his friends," who, by severe discipline, were instrumental in bringing him to a confession of his error. (See Zech. xiii. 3—6.)

We blush for the Church of England when we read of one of her Bishops at a loss to answer in the Name of the LORD, "a simple-minded, intelligent native, without being startled by a ghost of his own imagination." We are not told what answer "satisfied" the poor heathen inquirer "for the time, without throwing any discredit upon the general veracity of the Bible history." But we should have thought the task not very difficult. One endued with the "reasoning powers of mature age," coupled with "the docility of the child," is no unapt pupil. Such an one in the school of CHRIST is the perfection of a Christian. The Bible speaks of such, but they are trained in another, and far different school to the Bishop's. Such are they for whom our LORD "thanked His heavenly FATHER that to them He had revealed things which were hidden from the more wise and prudent" in their own eyes.

The Bishop possesses (it were well in this instance if he had less) abundance of the reasoning powers of mature age; we would recommend him to temper it with "the simple-mindedness and child-like docility of his intelligent native."

Were we disposed even to approach a jest on so serious a subject, we should style the Bishop's work—"the Bible tested by the rules of arithmetic, and found wanting; by Bishop Colenso, author of various *other* books of Arithmetic." The fact, however, is, and we grieve to say it, that the work throughout contains not one particle of faith: it is "salt which has lost its

savour, and wherewith, then, shall it be seasoned? It is, thenceforth, fit for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." Alas! we fear it will not universally meet with its just reward. We fear there are hundreds in these days "remarkable for fearlessness," as the Bishop says, and, as he hopes, "for sincerity, in the pursuit of truth"—we should have said remarkable for a fearless handling of divine truths—there are hundreds, we fear, who will, hereafter, (God grant it be not too late to amend!) trace their "stumbleings on the dark mountains of error, to the deceitful landmarks which the Bishop set for them, who, while they looked for light, turned it into the shadow of death, and made it gross darkness."

But, although, as we fear, the Bishop's work will do untold mischief to many in this present age of doubt and scepticism, we are rather amused at the confidence with which he speaks of his own powers. He really seems to think the whole fabric of faith will totter and fall beneath the weight of his arithmetic. Nay, so thoroughly is he imbued with the sight of his own figures, and so confident in the power of his arithmetical calculations, that he seems verily to believe, that even as in a division sum the quotient, multiplied by the divisor, will produce the dividend, and so prove the sum correct; even so, the whole Pentateuch history must fall to the ground by the magic wand of a Cambridge wrangler, who brings God's dealings with His ancient people to the test of *addition, subtraction, and multiplication*. Thus the history of the Exodus must fail in the same way, as in the eyes of posterity, the history of the movements of our armies to the Crimea would be considered a myth, if in the Commissariat department, so many unaccountable number of tents were assigned to so few means of carriage, or such a small amount of forage was said to have sustained so many horses.

Yes, it is by such miserable sophistry as this that the Bishop seems to take for granted that the faith of many will be shaken. So we gather, at least, from such passages as the following: "The result of my inquiry is this, that I have arrived at the conviction, as painful to myself, at first, as it may be to my readers, that the Pentateuch, as a whole, cannot possibly have

been written by Moses, or by anyone acquainted personally with the facts, and further, that the (so-called) Mosaic account, by whomsoever written . . . cannot be regarded as *historically true.*" (p. 8.) Again : "I trust I shall be preserved from saying a single word that may cause *unnecessary* pain to those who now embrace, with all their hearts, as a primary article of faith, the ordinary view of Scripture inspiration. *Pain*, I know, I must give to some."

Again : those who are presupposed to be affected by this work, are "meek, lowly, loving souls, who are walking daily with God, and have been taught to consider a belief in the historical veracity of the story of the Exodus, an essential part of their religion, upon which, indeed, as it seems to them, the whole fabric of their faith and hope in God is based." (p. 12.)

In the name of the faithful, "meek, lowly, loving souls, who are walking daily with God," we think we can relieve the Bishop from his fears. Pain he will cause, beyond doubt, but we weep not for ourselves, but for him. We think we can assure him, that his work will not shake one soul endued with the "grain of mustard-seed faith." He has so considerably overshot the mark—he has so entirely sunk all faith in a sea of figures, that his work cannot, we should say, possibly do more than help the sceptic on in his scepticism, and the infidel in his infidelity, whilst it will leave unscathed the child of God, who walks by faith. And when we read such a miserable piece of divinity, amounting to blasphemy, viz., that our Blessed Lord "was not acquainted more than any educated Jew of the age with the mysteries of modern science; nor that He knew more about the age and authorship of the Pentateuch than the pious and learned of His own age,"—when I say, we find this to be the best subterfuge for escaping from the weight which he evidently felt under the passages of Scripture to which this is an answer (pp. xxx., xxxi.). we feel that we may apply to the Bishop that proverb "*Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.*" It really seems as though, at this very point of his work, the Spirit of Him who inspired the Bible, removed for a moment the outward beauty of the sepulchre, and displayed to the eye which might be dazzled by its fair appearance, "the dead men's bones and all uncleanness," the imbecility and the

maze of false reasoning into which he is led, who presumes in shoes of earth to tread on holy ground. In his better moments, when unbiassed by the favourite view which he has here undertaken to defend—when he takes up his Bible, not for the purpose of argument and discussion about its inspiration, but as one who looks for comfort under the burthen of sins, and whose office it is to direct the darkened heathen to the Divine SAVIOUR—when in this frame of mind, which we trust is his in his less argumentative moments, the Bishop takes up that passage, “Had ye believed Moses ye would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me,” with his own remarks upon it, we cannot believe but that he will be startled by his own words. Is the Bishop aware when it was that our LORD spake those words—that it was at the close of His ministerial office, not when, as a child, He was said to “increase in wisdom as in stature,”—that it was at the close of a discourse, in which He had spoken of Himself as equal with the FATHER, as the future Judge of quick and dead, as, “the SON whom men should honour as they honour the FATHER?” This was the time at which He referred to Moses, as testifying of Him, and writing of Him; and yet this is the period of our LORD’s ministry, in which the Bishop speaks of Him as limited in His knowledge concerning His own revealed Word, and in the very hearing of our LORD’s declarations of His Divine power and knowledge, the Bishop says, as it were, “Is not this the Son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then is it that He saith, I came down from heaven?”

And whilst, by anticipation, the Bishop throws down our fabric of faith, by anticipation also, he promises to build up another. By anticipation he comforts those who mourn over the destruction of the first Temple, by a comfortable hint that the glory of the latter Temple shall be greater than the glory of the former: only, unfortunately, the promise in this instance, lacks the only thing which, in the original, gave it all its force, viz., “*saith the Lord.*” In this instance we have only, “thus saith Bishop Colenso.” “I cannot but feel,” says he, (p. 147,) “that having thus been compelled to take an active part in displaying the groundlessness of that notion of Scripture inspiration, which so many have regarded as the very foundation of

their faith and hope, a demand may be made upon me for something to supply the loss, for something to fill up the aching void, which will undoubtedly be felt at first, where *that* faith which has been built only or mainly upon the basis of the historical truth of the Pentateuch, must be in danger of collapsing, together with its support."

We must again express our amusement at the Bishop's confidence in his own powers to plant and to pull up, to throw down and re-build at his pleasure. In the name of the faithful we think we can again relieve him from his fears, and assure him that he is mistaken about "the aching void," which he supposes his powerful arithmetic will create. We do not anticipate an aching void in the soul of a single simple-minded docile, faithful child of God, and if there were such we should pity the soul which looked to the Bishop to fill up the void. For ourselves, we can truly say, we should find no sort of comfort in the imaginative Bible which would be substituted. We should have no sort of comfort in a Bible of which our own hearts should be allowed to judge as to what was true, and what was false. If that which has been hitherto esteemed the Word of God were found to fail, we should find no comfort in God's voice within our conscience, for we should have lost that sure Word which taught us to know God: we should be at sea without chart or compass. If one portion of the Bible be proved to be false, where with certainty could we put our hand upon that which is true? Indeed, it would be, many men, many minds—many minds, many different kinds of Bibles.

Who shall stay the torrent of error, when the barriers of certain, defined, revealed Truth have been broken down? What would remain for us but to drift with the tide? We should have no confidence in the voice of the conscience after the voice of the Bible had ceased to give a certain sound. In the absence of Revelation, S. Paul tells us (Rom. i.) that the light of natural reason was God's voice to the Gentile world; but it was not to take the place of direct Revelation. Had we no revealed Word of God, He would still not be "without witness, in giving us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with joy and gladness;" but then this only holds good in the absence of

the written Word. No; the Bible as it has been handed down and witnessed to from the beginning—this, or nothing. We have no such accommodating consciences as the Bishop anticipates (p. 153), which would lead us to recognise the third and sixth chapters of Exodus as inspired, whilst intervening chapters, or any other portion, are the writings of an impostor or fallible person. We must have something tangible,—something which we can lay our hand upon and say, ‘Between these two covers lies *the Word of God*. To this I bow with reverence; to this I succumb my own puny understanding, and adore where I cannot understand.’

And what are we of the present age, that the Bishop should imagine—an idea in which he seems to revel—that we should be especially chosen by God to prove that to be false which hitherto has been held most reverentially to be true? What is there in the present age to lead the Bishop to suppose that “the time is come, in the ordering of God’s Providence, when such a work as this (the submitting the Word of God to human criticism, to pronounce what is true, and what false) must be taken in hand?” What are we, I say, of this age, that such a work should be especially reserved for us? Are we so much holier in our lives and conversation than those saints of past days, who have gone down to their graves with the Bible engraven on their hearts as God’s unerring Word? Is it the absence of the childlike spirit, the walking by sight, and not by faith? or the aptness to scoff at things Divine? Is it the adulation of the human understanding and mental acuteness which so distinguish our own days, when in matters of religion every man “esteems his own things, and not the things of others?” or is it the multitude of “*Ites*” and “*Isms*” into which Christians are divided, hardly any two agreeing together?—or is it the love of many waxing cold, which our Lord foretold should be contemporary with “false Christs and false prophets,” who shall deceive many?—Is it any one of these characteristics of our days, or all of them together, which the Bishop thinks marks the present age as designed by Providence for such a work as criticising the infallibility of His Word?

And what benefit does the Bishop hope and expect will accrue

to the Church of CHRIST, when the missionaries shall no longer be restrained from making the Word of GOD bow down to the natural reason and intellect of the Zulu or the learned Hindoo, and when "the stories of the Bible shall be held to be only on a par with their own traditions," and "when we shall be able to meet the Mahomedan, and Brahmin, and Buddhist, on other and better terms than we do, being no longer obliged to maintain every part of the Bible as an infallible record of the past, and every word as the sacred utterance of the Spirit of GOD?"

And what compensating result does the Bishop expect, when he and every other Bishop shall be allowed to admit to the Diaconate any person who, instead of being tested as to his soundness by the Articles and Formularies of the Church, shall answer the requirements of each Bishop who holds that to be GOD'S Word which recommends itself to his own imagination? Was this the way in which this country was evangelized by Augustine and his followers? or is this the way in which the Gospel is still making its way in heathen lands? We trow not. It was bad enough, we learn, when, in the Corinthian Church, each one had "a doctrine, had a psalm, had an interpretation." How much worse will it be when each Bishop has his own Bible? The Apostle would hardly call this doing things "decently and in order."

The Bishop, we learn from his work (p. xxix.) intends hereafter to examine into the question, in what way the interpretation of the New Testament is affected by the unhistorical character of the Pentateuch. If the "Old Testament be not contrary to the New," we should suppose it very easy to show that it must be very considerably effected. We are only sorry to see that the recent decision in the Court of Arches has relieved the Bishop from the weight, which he had before felt, of his ordination and consecration vows. (P. xii.) We still hope, however, that when the attack is made upon the New Testament, the work will come out under the title, "A work by Colenso, *late* Bishop in the Church of England."

It may be we shall continue hereafter our remarks upon the Bishop's work, and shall hope to show how the letting in

of the light of faith will disperse the heap of rubbish beneath which he has endeavoured to bury the Word of God. In the meantime we commend the Bible more and more to the reader's prayerful, faithful meditation; and in proportion as he thus exercises himself, the more will that Word become, not a mark for the cavilling spirit, but "a lantern unto his feet, and a light unto his paths."

